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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Senior Honduran Officials Emphasize Importance of
Prosecution of TIP Cases to Visiting State Officials

11. (U) Summary: Rachel Owen of G/TIP and Michael Puccetti of WHA/PPC visited Honduras for meetings on trafficking in persons (TIP) February 9-11. Owen, Puccetti, INR TDYer, and PolOff met with key GOH officials to get updates on current Honduran anti-TIP efforts and emphasize USG interest. GOH meetings included Supreme Court President Vilma Morales, Attorney General Ovidio Navarro (with special prosecutors for women, children, and organized crime), Minister of Public Security Oscar Alvarez (with the heads of the Criminal Investigative Police and Frontier Police), and the inter-institutional commission on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. GOH officials strongly stated the importance of preventing and prosecuting TIP, and welcomed USG interest and technical assistance on the issue. End Summary.

12. (U) Rachel Owen, G/TIP and Michael Puccetti, WHA/PPC of the Department of State visited Honduras for meetings on trafficking in persons (TIP) February 9-11. Owen, Puccetti, INR TDYer, and PolOff met with key GOH officials to get updates on current Honduran anti-TIP efforts and emphasize USG interest. In each meeting, PolOff gave senior GOH officials copies of the 2004 TIP report and TIP interim assessment in Spanish, as well as a press release outlining the reasons for Owens and Puccetti's visit.

Attorney General: TIP a High Priority

13. (SBU) Attorney General Ovidio Navarro (accompanied by the special prosecutors for women, children, and organized crime) told USG officials February 11 that combating TIP was a high priority. Navarro said the Public Ministry was making progress, despite severe budgetary limitations. He said there was an internal Public Ministry working group on the issue, in addition to the inter-institutional commission. Navarro noted that he had pressed Supreme Court President Vilma Morales on the importance of the pending draft legislation on commercial sexual exploitation/trafficking in persons (CSE/TIP) that was awaiting a Supreme Court opinion. In the absence of this augmented legislation, Navarro and his prosecutors made clear the Public Ministry was willing and able to investigate and prosecute TIP cases on related charges.

Supreme Court President: Legislative Reform Needed

14. (SBU) Supreme Court President Vilma Morales reiterated her previous commitment to EmbOffs on strengthening Honduras' legal regime during a February 10 meeting with USG officials on TIP, and said that the Supreme Court would soon complete its judicial opinion on the pending draft CSE/TIP legislation, which she hoped would be sent back to the Congress shortly. She said that globalization made urgent the need for action and reform of the law, which she noted did not cover many aspects of CSE. She highlighted the role of the inter-institutional commission on the administration of justice (AOJ), formed to implement the relatively new Code of Criminal Procedure, and noted it was addressing AOJ issues also important in TIP cases, such as establishing a provisional witness protection policy.

Minister of Public Security: Political Will to Combat TIP

15. (SBU) Minister of Public Security Oscar Alvarez (accompanied by the heads of the Criminal Investigative Police and Frontier Police) told USG officials February 11 there was political will to combat TIP/CSE. Alvarez noted that "we have our problems, but we are doing what we can with what we have." He noted that there was greater awareness of the problem, a higher number of cases being reported, and a greater number of cases being investigated by the police. He noted that TIP/CSE was often difficult to investigate, and but said the police was seeking to attack

the problem more directly.

CSEC Inter-Institutional Commission Coordinates Efforts

16. (U) All three institutions discussed above are members of the inter-institutional commission on commercial sexual exploitation of children led by Ambassador Soledad de Ramirez Soto, the GOH delegate to the OAS Inter-American Commission on Women. The commission, which is essentially functioning as a task force on TIP, held a special session February 11 for the benefit of Owens and Puccetti to brief them on advances and challenges in combating TIP/CSEC. The commission now includes 52 GOH entities, NGOs, and international organizations.

Law Enforcement/Judiciary Officials Share Interest in TIP

17. (SBU) Comment: As Post notes in the 2004/2005 TIP report (septel), the GOH has continued its already existing efforts and made noticeable progress over the last year combating TIP. In general, recognition of the problem and motivation to combat it has become widespread within the GOH. While senior GOH officials were candid about their institutions' shortcomings and the need for USG technical assistance, it was also apparent that TIP/CSE was a key issue for top Honduran law enforcement and judicial officials. End Comment.

18. (U) Owens and Puccetti did not clear on this cable.

Palmer